



Testimony of
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Re HB 5671

The Connecticut Association of Schools

The Connecticut Association of Schools provides exemplary programs and services that promote excellence in the education of all children.

Testimony

Proposed Bill No. 5671 An Act Concerning The Date When Children May Register For Kindergarten

The Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) represents over 1100 elementary and secondary schools in Connecticut in advocating for the best interests of schools, their students, faculty and administrators. CAS supports a wide range of activities from academics to athletics, as well as providing professional development for school leaders.

The Connecticut Association of Schools supports legislative efforts to increase the age at which children are enrolled in Kindergarten. The educational community works within state guidelines to offer children developmentally appropriate instruction and improve academic achievement for all children. Further, it is the intent of CAS to secure the best possible educational opportunities for all Connecticut's children and as a result, narrow the achievement gap. Therefore, we concurrently support universal access to high quality pre-kindergarten programs.

Although Connecticut is the richest state, per capita, in the nation, it conversely has the nation's largest achievement gap as evidenced by performance on standardized national tests. The current legislation guiding the Kindergarten age of entrance presents a possible three-year age span among children and a discrepancy of the average age of students in urban and suburban populations. Requiring children to be five years of age on or before October will make certain that all students will be better able to succeed in increasingly rigorous kindergarten programs.

Position Statement

It is the position of the Connecticut Association of Schools that the entrance age of students enrolling in kindergarten be gradually moved to a unified state cutoff date of 10/1 while simultaneously seeking to design policies to ease the burden of childcare for affected families and provide access to high quality pre-kindergarten programs.

Rationale

- The **Education Commission of the States** reports in a 2010 study that thirty-six states have set the age of entrance to children who turn 5 on or before dates in September, four states set dates in October, two by December, and two states (including CT) set January one. The recent adoption of Common Core State Standards compels us to strongly consider the impact of Connecticut's entrance age as students start school.
- The **Connecticut State Department of Education Bureau of Early Childhood Education** reported in the 2009 student census data that sixty-two districts provide full-day kindergarten to all children; eight charter schools and nine magnet schools provide full day as well. Thirty-two districts provide full day to some children while seventeen districts provide extended day. Forty-four districts offer a half day program.
- Connecticut spends more on education than 46 other states, yet low-income fourth and eighth-graders are, on average, three grade levels behind their peers in reading and math.
- The **Kindergarten Entrance Inventory** (PA 05-245) indicates that wealthier Connecticut communities show larger gaps in skills across developmental domains as reported by teachers on the Connecticut State Department of Education Kindergarten Entrance Inventory.
- The **Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement** refers to state legislation to address the chronic and pervasive "preparation and readiness" gap that exists for low income and minority students with an accompanying provision of state-funded universal preschool education.
- The **Connecticut Early Care & Education Progress Report, 2010** states that the percentage of kindergarteners with preschool experience continues to vary widely between District Reference Groups (DRGs), suggesting that children from different socioeconomic groups have different levels of access to Early Childhood Education programs.

Barriers to providing all children with the best possible start in school

While research focusing on the age-of-entry sustained effect on academic achievement is mixed, the importance of a quality preschool experience helps to shape behaviors and attitudes for learning. Thus, issues of cost and quality of preschools should be examined. Specifically;

- Limited resources for poorer families to attend quality preschool.
- Lack of quality licensed preschool education for all children with common standards.
- Limited information available for all families on early child developmental milestones and early childhood education with systemic outreach to at-risk populations.
- Vast age range in kindergarten classrooms as a result of the option for delayed entry.

Response to Change – Recommendations

- Provide training for preschools in common standards and delivery of developmentally appropriate programs.
- Provide bilingual/multicultural trainings for preschool educators focused on specific strategies for language acquisition with emphasis on oral language development.
- Provide a population study projecting impact on kindergarten enrollment numbers for districts across the state.
- Provide a population study projecting the impact on qualified preschool and infant/toddler programs for the students who are no longer eligible for Kindergarten.

Recent Legislation

In the 2011 January session of the General Assembly, Raised Bill No. SB00928 required a study of issues concerning teacher preparation and training requirements and alternate routes to certification in early childhood education. In the same session, Raised Bill No. SB00927 revised the requirements for early childhood educators and directed the Commissioner of Education to use unexpended funds for providing professional development to school readiness staff. Both Bills are referred to the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement. Connecticut is preparing a stronger foundation of qualified early childhood educators.

Conclusion

All children who enter kindergarten deserve the best possible start in school. In order to provide all children the opportunity to reach important developmental milestones, acquire key readiness skills, and engage in an increasingly rigorous kindergarten,

Connecticut's children need to have the time to attend a quality preschool program and start kindergarten with age appropriate peers. CAS supports Connecticut's efforts to narrow the timeframe for enrollment in kindergarten. Proposed Bill No. 5671 must be examined along with coordinated efforts to provide a quality preschool experience for at-risk learners.

References

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